To whom it may concern,

I'm here today to express my feelings regarding the new policy that was implemented on 1/5/2026. The policy addresses the changes in staffing levels and time off request for dispatch and patrol.

The decision to lower staffing levels is not a wise decision. Personally, I feel that the decisions are being made by upper management without actual knowledge of what REALLY goes on in this communications center. I can honestly say that supervisors and command staff rarely have come into the communications center. They have never sat in here for more than 15-20 minutes at a time. They have come in at other times only to go straight into the crime analyst's or system analyst's office.

For command staff or city administrators to choose a city budget over the well-being of its employees is negligent in my opinion. Dispatch already has numerous employees out for medical reasons. Asking the current dispatchers to do more work with less staffing will only cause more stress for those of us that are trying to keep this ship afloat. Dispatch is always the catch all when other division

Over a year ago, the police department adopted an employee wellness program allowing employees to take a "wellness break", twice a week for 30 minutes. Since that program was implemented, I have been able to only take a handful of these so-called breaks due to limited staffing in the communications center.

I feel that these decision makers are not looking at the big picture of daily police operations. With dispatch doing more work (i.e. more call taking, radio traffic and data entry among other things) with less staffing, the city's safety and the officer's safety are a major risk. I know that if something bad were to happen to an officer or a citizen while on my watch, the burden would lie heavily on me. I personally have been through traumatic incidents here at work. I keep it to myself and keep on trucking because my department and partners rely on me showing up to do my part.

This policy will also affect dispatchers getting the proper training to do our jobs because there is no one available to cover shifts for training. While other divisions within the department are getting the proper training to do their jobs

Morale in communications is already low as it is. Everyone is already overworked and is on the verge of burnout. Please reconsider going back to the old staffing levels for not just the dispatcher's sake but also for the sake of our officers and citizens.

I'm not the best at writing these things up but I wanted to let you guys know that I'm not happy with the policy.

Outlook

Concerns Regarding Proposed Dispatch Staffing Reductions

From

Date Fri 1/2/2026 12:28 AM

To Nickolas Barton <nbarton@cityofsantamaria.org>; Katie Alvarez <kalvarez@cityofsantamaria.org>; Timothy Trefts <ttrefts@cityofsantamaria.org>; Michael Parker <mparker@cityofsantamaria.org>; Mathew Silver <msilver@cityofsantamaria.org>; Matthew Boland <mboland@cityofsantamaria.org>; Shanna Hixenbaugh <shixenbaugh@cityofsantamaria.org>

Dear POA Board Members,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposed staffing reductions outlined in the recent memo regarding the staffing and time-off policy.

I want to share my perspective based on both my current experience here and my prior experience working at another dispatch center that operated with similar staffing levels. In that agency, reduced staffing resulted in significant burnout across the dispatch floor. The workload became unsustainable, morale declined, and ultimately many experienced employees left due to chronic exhaustion and stress.

Currently, our workload is already heavy. There are frequent periods where dispatchers are required to manage multiple calls simultaneously, placing callers on hold while critical incidents are being handled and directing officers to stand by on the radio due to call volume. This level of demand requires sustained focus, rapid decision-making, and constant prioritization, often without adequate recovery time. Over long periods, this is mentally and emotionally draining.

Prolonged caller hold times, delayed information relay, and increased radio congestion are direct consequences of inadequate staffing. These factors impact response quality, situational awareness, and response times for officers and emergency personnel in the field.

Increased burnout, fatigue, and exhaustion also create a significant liability concern. Chronic fatigue can lead to errors in call-taking, delayed responses, and impaired decision-making. These risks directly impact officer safety, responder safety, and public safety. Dispatchers are often the first link in the emergency response chain, and any decline in performance due to excessive workload or fatigue has serious operational consequences.

Reducing staffing further may create short-term budget relief, but it risks long-term costs through increased errors, higher turnover, loss of experienced personnel, and increased liability exposure. The cost of training new dispatchers, combined with the operational and safety risks of understaffed shifts, may ultimately outweigh any anticipated savings.

Dispatchers play a critical role in public and officer safety. Adequate dispatch staffing is not a convenience, it is a foundational component of safe, effective policing operations. I appreciate the POA's advocacy on behalf of its members and respectfully ask that these concerns be strongly considered as discussions continue.

Thank you for your time and for representing us.

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express urgent concerns regarding the proposed staffing reductions within the dispatch center, particularly given that we are already operating short-staffed due to personnel being out for various reasons.

Even prior to these proposed reductions, we have been routinely required to work under staffing levels that fall below what is necessary for safe and effective operations. As a result, we are frequently tasked with answering 911 calls while simultaneously working a radio channel. Managing emergency calls, officer traffic, and critical incidents at the same time is placing an extreme cognitive and emotional burden on us and significantly increases mental fatigue. This level of multitasking in a high-stakes environment is mentally draining and unsustainable. We are expected to process life-or-death information, prioritize multiple emergencies, and support officers in the field without error—all while working with fewer staff than required. The constant overload leads to heightened stress, exhaustion, and burnout, increasing the likelihood of mistakes that could have serious consequences for both dispatchers and officers.

The proposed staffing minimums also raise serious concerns for officer safety. We serve as the primary lifeline for officers, and when staffing is insufficient, situational awareness, response times, and communication quality can suffer. Operating with reduced personnel while call volume and radio traffic remain high creates unnecessary risk for everyone involved.

Continuing to reduce staffing under these conditions places an unreasonable and unsafe burden on your dispatch personnel and threatens the long-term stability of the dispatch center. It also increases the risk of turnover, extended leave due to stress, and further staffing shortages—creating a cycle that becomes increasingly difficult to correct.

I strongly urge leadership to reconsider the staffing reductions and take immediate steps to address the existing shortages. Adequate staffing is essential to protect our well-being, ensure officer safety, and maintain effective emergency response operations.

Thank you for your time and attention to this serious matter. I hope these concerns will be addressed with the urgency they warrant.

Dispatcher II
Ext. 2277

Outlook

Operational Staffing Concerns

From [redacted]

Date Wed 12/31/2025 9:25 PM

To Nickolas Barton <nbarton@cityofsantamaria.org>; Katie Alvarez <kalvarez@cityofsantamaria.org>; Timothy Trefts <ttrefts@cityofsantamaria.org>; Michael Parker <mparker@cityofsantamaria.org>; Mathew Silver <msilver@cityofsantamaria.org>; Matthew Boland <mboland@cityofsantamaria.org>; Shanna Hixenbaugh <shixenbaugh@cityofsantamaria.org>

Cc Pamela McNeil <pmcneil@cityofsantamaria.org>; Laura Brannon <lbrannon@cityofsantamaria.org>; David Washington <dwashington@cityofsantamaria.org>

Good morning POA Board,

I understand that many of you are already receiving lengthy communications on this topic, and that the response has often been, "we are taking this to Command staff." However, it is imperative that I formally document my concerns, both for clarity and as a record should these issues escalate further.

The significant staffing changes underway involve multiple considerations, but two critical areas demand immediate attention: officer and community safety, and employee wellness.

Officer and Community Safety – Officer safety is non-negotiable. In my role, I strive to provide accurate information, process calls efficiently and manage radio traffic effectively. None of this is possible without the support of my partners and line-level dispatchers. We are already operating well below established staffing minimums—numbers based not on opinion, but on objective call volume data from a nationally recognized third party as an industry standard.
It is deeply concerning that operational decisions appear to disregard these standards. The Chief's recent communication cited budget as the sole rationale for the changes. During our only meeting with the Chief, he suggested that Oxnard PD Dispatch handles a higher call volume with fewer staff—a comparison that does not reflect our operational reality. According to publicly available data, Oxnard PD has 25 full-time positions, including 19 dispatchers, 5 supervisors, and a communications manager. **Prioritizing budget over officer safety is unacceptable and should serve as a major warning to all personnel.**

Employee Wellness – Our department has made meaningful strides to support wellness, including a committee and program allowing personnel to step aside from duties for well-being. Yet current staffing levels routinely make these breaks impossible. As a result, this program has effectively become obsolete. We have already experienced a dispatch supervisor on stress leave. The risk of additional stress-related leave, missed radio traffic, employee attrition, and transfers is now critical. At what point will staffing and operational decisions meaningfully address these escalating risks before more personnel are affected?

When the Chief was hired, it was understood that officer welfare would be a top priority. Based on recent decisions and the content of the Chief's email, it is evident that budgetary concerns are currently taking precedence over officer safety and employee wellness. This is a serious and urgent issue that requires immediate review and action to prevent operational failure, increased liability, and further harm to personnel.

Outlook

Re: New Staffing and Time Off Policy

Date Wed 12/31/2025 8:23 PM

To Nickolas Barton <nbarton@cityofsantamaria.org>; Katie Alvarez <kalvarez@cityofsantamaria.org>; Timothy Trefts <ttrefts@cityofsantamaria.org>; Michael Parker <mparker@cityofsantamaria.org>; Mathew Silver <msilver@cityofsantamaria.org>; Matthew Boland <mboland@cityofsantamaria.org>; PD Dispatchers Senior <PDDispatchersSenior@cityofsantamaria.org>; Shanna Hixenbaugh <shixenbaugh@cityofsantamaria.org>

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to formally express serious concerns regarding the recent changes in staffing and overtime policy, particularly as they affect the Santa Maria Police Department Dispatch Center.

As a dedicated Santa Maria Police dispatcher, I have been working significantly longer hours with fewer staff available. While this demonstrates dedication and professionalism, it is not a sustainable or safe operating model. Extended shifts, combined with reduced staffing, place an unreasonable burden on dispatch personnel and create conditions that lead to physical and mental exhaustion.

We are already seeing increased illness, burnout, and declining morale as a direct result of these changes. When dispatchers are fatigued, overworked, and stressed, it directly impacts their ability to perform at the high level required for emergency communications. This not only affects their well-being but also the quality of service provided to the public and to officers in the field.

Dispatch is a critical link between officers and the resources they rely on to do their jobs safely. Staffing shortages and fatigue increase the risk of delayed response times, communication errors, and missed information, all of which can have serious consequences for officer safety and public trust. When dispatchers are stretched beyond reasonable limits, it compromises both customer service and operational effectiveness.

Morale in the Santa Maria Dispatch Center has also suffered. Dispatchers feel overwhelmed, undervalued, and unsupported, which only worsens retention and performance issues. These working conditions make it difficult to recruit and retain qualified personnel, creating a cycle that further destabilizes operations.

I urge leadership to reevaluate the current staffing model and workload expectations for the Santa Maria Police Department Dispatch Center. Adequate staffing levels, reasonable shift lengths, and support for dispatcher wellness are essential to maintaining the high standards of service, safety, and professionalism that both the public and officers depend on.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I hope these concerns will be taken seriously and addressed promptly.

Respectfully,

Outlook

officer safety & staffing concerns

From

Date Tue 1/6/2026 11:35 AM

To Nickolas Barton <nbarton@cityofsantamaria.org>; Katie Alvarez <kalvarez@cityofsantamaria.org>; Timothy Trefts <ttrefts@cityofsantamaria.org>; Shanna Hixenbaugh <shixenbaugh@cityofsantamaria.org>; Matthew Boland <mboland@cityofsantamaria.org>; Michael Parker <mparker@cityofsantamaria.org>; Mathew Silver <msilver@cityofsantamaria.org>

January 6th, 2026

As all of you are aware, there were recent staffing changes made to dispatch which immediately created great concern for majority of dispatchers, the overall wellness of the dispatchers but most importantly, safety for our officers in the field.

Santa Maria Police Dispatch was known to be one of the most efficient dispatch centers in this area since I began my dispatching career in 2012. While most dispatch centers dealt with high turnover rates, mandated overtime shifts built into regular schedules, and poor morale, Santa Maria Police Dispatch thrived until now.

I was hired as a dispatcher at Santa Maria Police Department in November 2019 and saw firsthand why it had the positive reputation it did. The center was fully staffed with all the 20 dispatchers working in 2019. The dispatchers that have left the department since I was hired left because of retirement or continue their career or personal growth out of state but recently people started looking at other jobs because of the liability and demands placed on the dispatchers mainly due to staffing. Issues range from over exhaustion due to skipped breaks or people calling out what seems more frequent now, to being unable to complete tasks for officers posing a large safety concern due to 911s ringing and not enough staffing working phones to answer them. Decreasing the minimum number of staff at our center and cutting positions is not the answer to the above-mentioned concerns.

In 6 years, the number of dispatchers working at the center has decreased due to medical reasons, stress and other personal reasons. The demands of the job from officers and citizens are increasing greatly without staff numbers improving, like positions being cut, minimum staffing decreasing and not backfilling from human resources with incoming new dispatchers. Currently, there is not a trainee in dispatch, and the department has been made aware of additional to the short staffing concerns. Training a new dispatcher can take up to 12 months and even after expressing concern, The City of Santa Maria still has not opened the entry level dispatch application as of today.

Dispatchers at Santa Maria police department perform records duties after 1700 hours and during weeks and holidays, which most departments this size have their own 24-hour records personnel or designated dispatcher to perform those duties. Santa Maria Police Department does not run a 24/7 records department, which results in a dispatcher working a radio channel, now performing records duties. The

demands of channel 2, answering 911 calls due to staffing and now required from 0300-0700 hours due to the decreased minimum staffing level are a risk to officer safety.

Most dispatchers at SMPD do as much as they can to support their officers in the field or any other personnel in this department, but the current staffing levels at Santa Maria Police Department dispatch make it challenging to continue supporting our officers in the way that we have been. Some of those methods of support or above and beyond tasks are checking Flock, checking Axon Evidence for ALPR hits, reading through P1 reports, checking CAD priors and priors with the phone numbers and CAD priors and running people involved all while the officers are on a call or responding to calls for service. In comparison to other agencies (FLOCK specifically) throughout the county, SMPD dispatch utilizes it a lot more to assist patrol, if not on most in progress calls. So much that it has been thought by officers that there is a "FLOCK duty" dispatcher, which we do not have the staffing for.

Most dispatchers show pride in working in this department. We have set the standard on what officer support high but that is quickly hurting us and officers since we do not have enough dispatchers to continue to provide that type of service for our officers. *OFFICER SAFETY/SUPPORT* is our number one goal. Aside from personal opinions about people specifically, this emergency communications center does a great job statistically and compared to other agencies.

In 2024, SMPD took a total of 199,251 calls which is a total of 545 per day (average) and 23 calls per hour. During that hour, there is only one call taker or two call takers if we are fortunate that shift, and most calls received take more than the average of 2.5 minutes to interrogate. During multiple in progress incidents, the 911 calls keep ringing & one call taker is not enough and hazardous to the community and officers. During busy periods, most incoming calls into SMPD dispatch do so at the same time, which puts the PD 2 dispatcher at answering phones or worse, PD 1 dispatcher, the primary radio frequency.

Decreasing SMPD's minimum staffing would increase the likelihood of the radio dispatchers answering 911 calls which results in jeopardizing officer safety by traffic being missed if there is a major emergency on 911 that needs to be dispatched simultaneously by the PD 1 dispatcher or PD 2 dispatcher during code 33.

Personal accounts in 2025:

On May 9th, 2025, while I was working PD2, on an overtime shift due to staffing shortages, I answered a 911 call. The reporting party reported a male who just stabbed his wife who still had the knife in his hand. The reporting party was fighting to keep the suspect with the knife down while talking to the 911 dispatcher, who also worked a radio channel. During that time, officers were requesting to be placed on the call for service and be shown en route on PD 2. This is an example that shows how divided attention (listening to the reporting party holding the murder suspect down who is still resisting and was armed with a knife), and acknowledging officers and putting officers in en route status while attempting to update the call with reporting party information who held down the resisting subject with a *knife* puts the officers at enormous risk. Any delay in information input delays it to PD1 as well, which delays it to officers resulting in jeopardizing officer safety. Incident SMPD25030149 (4 dispatchers working that day)

On June 3rd, 2025, I answered a 911 call while working PD2 due to staffing and activity level. The reporting party reported that his dad was just stabbed and the suspect had left but during the call, the suspect returned. While I was trying to interrogate the call to best assist responding officers, especially type of call for service involving weapons, officers asked to be placed on the call for service and be shown en route to the call. All those requests were met by the PD2 dispatcher and during that time I was still trying to get more information for the call for service after hearing distress sounds. During that time, the suspect also shot at the reporting party/ second victim. During that time, I was monitoring the radio as well and the shot was not heard on the phone by the call taker. To this day it is unclear if it was due to the radio traffic and trying to focus on officer's radio traffic or the sound did not carry. This not only puts officers at risk but also raises the dispatcher's mental wellness. Incident SMPD25036269 (5 dispatchers scheduled during this time, with one dispatcher on break)

On July 4th 2025, I answered a 911 call while working PD 1 due to staffing and room and activity. The line 911 call was mostly an open line with people screaming and crying, it was an additional reporting party to a shooting that just occurred. As a PD 1 dispatcher, the radio is priority and officer safety is priority. Dispatching accurate information in a timely manner is extremely important which was challenging while trying to listen and interrogate a 911 call where someone had just been shot. A shooting gives clear indication that a weapon was used which is crucial information and officer safety comments or information is relayed to responding officers immediately. Trying to take a call jeopardizes safety. The other alternative would be to keep that 911 caller on hold knowing they can provide useful and necessary information which will also impact officer safety. Incident SMPD25043814 (4 dispatchers on duty)

I am only one of the several of center's dispatchers who have similar experiences. Along with activity and types of calls, the real issue lies with staffing levels and the demands of SMPD dispatchers. There are not enough dispatchers (call takers) to answer the calls as they come in when real emergencies happen.

Dispatchers are aware of the budget issues the city of Santa Maria is facing but putting the communities we serve and first responders at risk by decreasing staffing in the 911 center is not an exchange in a job where people's lives are on the line every day. No cuts in staffing to save money are worth that cost.

Article information:

"But staffing is the challenge that arguably is the most worrisome. Staffing always has been an issue for the 911 community. Telecommunicators typically are on the lower end of the pay scale—they don't get paid anywhere near what they are worth—and the job is incredibly stressful" (https://www.911.gov/assets/Workforce-Optimization---A-Smarter-Solution-to-Resolving-911-Staffing-Struggles.pdf)

"When a 911 call goes unanswered, the results can be devastating. In one PSAP, according to the USA Today article, 20 positions were vacant of the 134 that were authorized due to a hiring freeze. The staffing shortage was cited as a significant factor in a three-day-old child's death. The child had been bitten by the family's dog. The parents called 911 and were placed on hold for 28 seconds. They hung up and tried again. This time they were placed on hold for 34 seconds. They reportedly then gave up on an ambulance being dispatched and in desperation drove their baby to the hospital—where it was

pronounced dead." (https://www.911.gov/assets/Workforce-Optimization---A-Smarter-Solution-to-Resolving-911-Staffing-Struggles.pdf)

"Community Safety at Risk: Not only are staffing shortages and stress levels impacting first responders personally, but they also pose a serious threat to the communities they serve. Reduced resources, delayed response times, and increased workload are compromising the ability of first responders to fulfill their duties effectively, putting lives at risk.

- Nearly half of police officers say their response time to high-priority calls has increased..." (Lexipol Survey Uncovers Alarming Staffing Shortages and Stress Levels Reported by First Responders by Lexipol Team).

"What these professionals are experiencing isn't just stress — it's systemic fatigue," said Brian Fontes, CEO of NENA, in a statement. "This year's findings are a wake-up call: Real investments are needed to ensure 9-1-1 professionals are supported, protected, and equipped to better serve their communities and care for themselves in these high-stress roles." (Sarah Roebuck, Police 1)

Outlook

Regarding the Minimum Staffing Policy

Date Wed 12/31/2025 8:04 PM

To PD Dispatchers Senior <PDDispatchersSenior@cityofsantamaria.org>

Cc Nickolas Barton <nbarton@cityofsantamaria.org>; Shanna Hixenbaugh <shixenbaugh@cityofsantamaria.org>; Katie Alvarez <kalvarez@cityofsantamaria.org>; Timothy Trefts <ttrefts@cityofsantamaria.org>; Matthew Boland <mboland@cityofsantamaria.org>; Mathew Silver <msilver@cityofsantamaria.org>; Michael Parker <mparker@cityofsantamaria.org>

To whom it may concern,

I would like to air some major concerns about the policy that is being implemented in January regarding minimum staffing, pertaining to dispatch.

I feel this policy is dangerous and grossly negligent at best. It not only risks officer safety but also the mental health and wellbeing of current dispatch employees. Lowering the minimum required staffing while still having us process every 9-1-1 call coming into the dispatch center, interrogating, and either transferring for medical or generating a call for service for the city and working the LE channels without missing vital officer safety information is going to cause undue stress and burnout to those already working one of the most stressful positions within this department.

We have already seen employees physically affected by undue stress at work, reducing the number of people doing the *same* amount of work is only going to exacerbate these issues. The city has implemented a "wellness" program to offset some stress, but as it stands wellness breaks can't be taken by everyone due to activity level. Reducing the staffing means even less people will be able to use these breaks, because there won't be enough bodies in dispatch to cover someone leaving to take them. Pretending to care about our wellness while actively increasing our workload per dispatcher feels like a slap in the face, to be honest.

Contrary to popular belief by our command staff, the removal of the designated fire dispatcher did not reduce our workload. We still answer all the 9-1-1 calls that come in for fire, get addresses and circumstances of the call (which takes time, especially If there is a language barrier) before we can transfer to the county regional center. We also must spend extra time calling back and forth to get updates that are pertinent for LE since we are no longer sitting in the room with the dispatcher talking to fire. This takes up MORE time and resources than our previous system, and yet you feel the need to mention we are doing LESS work and use that as justification to limit our numbers.

It is clear from the attempted implementation of this policy that no one in a position of authority has spent more than a few minutes here and there in dispatch and has no idea of the extraordinary workload placed upon us. Visiting in times of calm and anticipating that to be how it is 24/7 in dispatch is irresponsible and careless. While records have been short, we were expected to take on their workload with data entry, and yet no one seems to care that we were also understaffed at the time and in a much more high-stress environment.

Even those placed in direct supervision of us barely spend time in the dispatch center- if our direct supervisors aren't in here, how can they accurately relay information to command staff about our activity level? All they see is glimpses of reality. It's like seeing a patrol car driving to a call and assuming they're

just wasting time and gas driving around doing nothing. You're missing the bigger picture, and the bigger picture is essential to understand how we operate. Ignoring us and then assuming we're not really doing much shows how out of touch those making these decisions are with reality.

As it is, we are expected to run people officers are out with, while also taking calls and relaying information. The more pressure put on one dispatcher to perform all these tasks simultaneously, greatly increases the likelihood of important information being missed. We constantly have to tell officers to stand by on channel two when they are trying to run potentially dangerous people as it is, because we also are answering in-progress calls, occasionally where people are being shot or stabbed at the same time. Both things have major officer safety concerns- how are we supposed to deal with weighing those decisions, especially if something happens to an officer because we missed something important because we were being asked to do too much? I speak here not only as a dispatcher but as a wife to an officer, I am concerned for his safety now more than I have ever been in his 10+ years of law enforcement, because I see firsthand the delays caused by inadequate staffing inside of dispatch. This problem will only continue to get worse with less manpower in the room.

As it stands, morale in dispatch is the lowest it has been since I came here. Even at current staffing levels - we are overworked, under-appreciated, and our concerns are quite frankly, frequently ignored by upper management. We are a catch-all department for the tasks that should be done by other departments because our oversight has no idea the volume of what we do, and we usually take it without pushbacks. But reducing overall staffing during the busiest times is going to overwhelm a system already pushed to its limitations.

Most importantly, only having two dispatchers covering this center **at any time** is unfair and unsafe to those dispatchers, the public, and officers. Are they expected to hold their bladder for hours due to activity level? What happens if there is a prolonged incident? Would you expect two patrol officers to handle a major incident by themselves with no support or backup in sight, on a regular basis? This is unsafe. It will put officers at risk. It will cause dispatchers to leave and impact laterals choosing to transfer here, which will only increase overtime and burnout of those left behind. This is a giant step backwards in officer safety, in dispatcher wellness, and in morale.

I left a career of over a decade to come here because of poor staffing at my last agency, which was creating undue stress and terrible morale. I could have chosen to work for any number of agencies closer to home, but I decided to drive an HOUR to and from work to come to Santa Maria, because at the time- even though it's a stressful job- they seemed to care about the mental health and well-being of their employees. They had support systems, had opportunities to take time off and breathe, and allowed those who worked there to not be all-consumed by a job which already requires contact with situations that would overwhelm most people. Enforcement of this policy takes away the reasons I chose to leave where I was and come to Santa Maria. This dangerous policy makes me consider seeking employment elsewhere.

Santa Maria Police Department
1111 West Betteravia Road
Santa Maria, California
(805)928-3781 ext 2277

Outlook

Concerns Regarding Staffing Policy 210.1 and Minimum Staffing Reductions

From

Date Thu 1/1/2026 6:30 AM

To Nickolas Barton <nbarton@cityofsantamaria.org>; Katie Alvarez <kalvarez@cityofsantamaria.org>; Timothy Trefts <ttrefts@cityofsantamaria.org>; Michael Parker <mparker@cityofsantamaria.org>; Mathew Silver <msilver@cityofsantamaria.org>; Matthew Boland <mboland@cityofsantamaria.org>; Shanna Hixenbaugh <shixenbaugh@cityofsantamaria.org>

Cc PD Dispatchers Senior <PDDispatchersSenior@cityofsantamaria.org>

POA Board,

I am writing to you to formally express my concerns regarding the recent changes to staffing policy 210.1, as proposed by the Chief on December 30, 2025.

As a long-time POA member, it is extremely disheartening to see our department revert to staffing standards that feel as though we have gone "ten years backward." Dispatch has spent years advocating for and achieving safer staffing levels, only to see those gains erased without meaningful consideration of how these changes directly impact dispatch operations and personnel. This is not progress; it is regression.

At shift change alone, Dispatch will be operating with four dispatchers out on medical leave, one vacant dispatch position, and one frozen dispatch position. Against this backdrop, the staffing reductions outlined in the Chief's email are deeply concerning. Making decisions that significantly affect the Dispatch Center without regular interaction with its employees or a demonstrated understanding of how the center functions undermines trust and sends a clear message that our dispatchers' input, experience, and well-being are not being valued. This comes across disingenuous, unrealistic and irresponsible.

We have repeatedly voiced concerns regarding reductions to minimum staffing, yet those concerns appear to be falling on deaf ears. Specifically, the elimination of the fourth dispatcher from 0000–0300 hours and the reduction from three to two dispatchers from 0300–0700 hours is alarming. There are many instances during these hours when activity levels are overwhelming even with three dispatchers on the floor. Reducing staffing to three and, at times, only two dispatchers creates a significant liability for the department and places an unfair and unsustainable burden on dispatch personnel. Expecting dispatchers to consistently work short-staffed, with increased call volume and radio traffic, contributes directly to fatigue, burnout, and diminished performance.

Beyond operational risk, these staffing reductions have a serious and lasting impact on dispatcher morale and wellness. Dispatchers already work in a high-stress, high-liability environment that requires constant multitasking, rapid decision-making, and exposure to traumatic events. When minimum staffing is reduced, dispatchers are forced to work with fewer breaks, higher cognitive load, and increased fear of making critical mistakes. This erodes morale, increases sick time and medical leave, and accelerates attrition further worsening the staffing crisis we are already facing.

Over the past two decades, the climate in our community has changed dramatically, and call volume and activity have increased substantially. These staffing reductions do not just negatively impact dispatchers; they also affect our officers and, ultimately, the public we serve. Expecting only two dispatchers to manage two radio channels, both of which can be primary simultaneously, while also serving as the first

public safety answering point for all 911 calls for Santa Maria and Guadalupe is dangerous. Under these conditions, either radio traffic will be missed, 911 calls will go unanswered, or both. We cannot reasonably expect dispatchers to safely juggle all of these responsibilities without consequence.

Our Lead Dispatchers met with the Chief, command staff, and a lieutenant to bring these concerns forward and to explain the operational realities of our center. Additionally, our POA Board representative provided facts and statistics supporting the need to maintain our current minimum staffing levels. Dispatch agreed to be a team player and assist with managing overtime costs without reducing minimum staffing to critical levels. Despite this, comparisons continue to be made to an agency staffed with 25 full-time positions, including 19 dispatchers, five supervisors who do not work the floor or count toward daily staffing, and a communications manager. There is no valid comparison. Our center is budgeted for 16 dispatchers and four Leads who do work the floor and are counted in minimum staffing, with no communications manager. Unfortunately, it appears these distinctions are not being acknowledged.

The Chief's email states that these staffing cuts are necessary due to the city's budget deficit. However, as history and experience have shown, cutting staffing often leads to greater long-term costs, higher overtime usage, increased workers' compensation and medical leave, declining morale, recruitment and retention challenges, and increased risk to employee and public safety.

You, the POA Board, serves as our advocate in meetings with command staff, and we rely on the Board to represent the realities faced by our dispatchers on a daily basis. Our expectation is that the Board will strongly and clearly convey the operational, safety, and wellness concerns outlined above and advocate against staffing reductions that place dispatchers, officers, and the public at risk. We also expect transparency, follow-through, and meaningful dialogue when decisions of this magnitude are being considered.

I am aware that the Board is receiving multiple letters expressing concern regarding staffing and minimum staffing changes. I am hopeful these concerns will be taken seriously and addressed in a timely and meaningful manner, with consideration given not only to budgets, but to the health, morale, and sustainability of our Dispatch Center.

Respectfully submitted,

POA member

Santa Maria Police Department
Office: 805-928-3781 Ext. 2453
Cell: 805-249-8352

Sent: Wednesday, December 31, 2025 3:00 PM
To: PD Dispatchers Senior <PDDispatchersSenior@cityofsantamaria.org>; Nickolas Barton <nbarton@cityofsantamaria.org>; Katie Alvarez <kalvarez@cityofsantamaria.org>; Timothy Trefts <ttrefts@cityofsantamaria.org>; Michael Parker <mparker@cityofsantamaria.org>; Mathew Silver <msilver@cityofsantamaria.org>; Matthew Boland <mboland@cityofsantamaria.org>
Subject: Schedule Change Concerns

Hello POA Board and Dispatch Seniors,

I have a few concerns regarding the email that came out on 12-30-2025 from the Chief regarding our "New Staffing Policy and Time off Policy." I am signed up to work an AM shift (21-07 WTFS) to start in January 2026. In looking at what these new changes are, it shows only 3 dispatchers from 00-03, as well as 2 dispatchers working from 03-07, which is extremely concerning for me as well as other dispatchers. There are a few issues that I would like to bring up and get clarification on.

With the call volume this center is capable of, and I have experienced since being at this agency, this is going to cause a huge safety issue. It will be a safety issue for officers as well as put the dispatchers in a situation where there is more of a chance to become liable for some type of error. If we have a fire, a major TC, major weather issue or some large event there will be multiple 911 lines ringing. We will miss 911 calls. If we only have the PD1 and PD2 dispatchers available, our Reporting Party and officers are going to get very frustrated with dispatch. Also, if there are two major incidents that occur simultaneously, which does happen here, we are not going to be able to answer 911 lines, business lines and talk on the radios in an efficient and timely manner. One foot pursuit with a code 33 will utilize the PD1 dispatcher, so that second dispatcher is now PD1, PD2, trying to answer all phone calls as well as officer requests. It is not feasible, and an unreasonable expectation for dispatchers to answer every 911 call with only 2 dispatchers in the room during major events. Important 911 calls and radio traffic will absolutely be missed. Which in turn is extremely stressful for a dispatcher to handle on a repeated, daily basis.

What if someone needs to use the restroom between 03-07? We will have one dispatcher on the floor. How is that a safe and fair workplace?

Is there not a time frame that we as dispatchers need to be notified of a schedule change, like this, before we pick our shifts? I would NOT have chosen an AM shift if I knew this was going to happen. I would NOT purposely put myself in a position with that additional liability and stress.

It is also very concerning and disappointing coming from another agency that had these same issues and now seeing this agency put themselves in a position that I previously left. It's not progress, it's regressing and putting the dispatch center at risk.

There are many other issues with the "New Staffing and Time Off Policy" that are concerning and questionable not only me but to other dispatchers as well. Our dispatch center is already having issues with low staffing creating mental health and morale issues. I believe implementing these new policies will just increase these issues and our retention rate will continue to decrease. These are just a few issues I wanted to address first. I look forward to receiving a response regarding these concerns in the near future.

Sincerely,

Dispatcher II
Santa Maria Police Department
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